

Castlemaine Naturalist

September 2016

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Pelican, Lake Joanna - photo by Noel Young

Swift Parrot Survey 13/8/16

Geraldine Harris

Despite there being little prospect of seeing Swift Parrots (most recent sightings were over a month ago) a car load of members enjoyed a morning of bird watching in Swift Parrot territory along Rilens Road, Golf Links Track, Red White & Blue Track, and Muckleford School Road.

As we entered the Muckleford Forest, large swathes of bush litter indicated recent heavy rainfall in the area and for a short period bird watching gave way to orchid spotting as we discovered a small patch of Nodding Greenhood (*Pterostylis nutans*) and lots of Dwarf Greenhoods (*P. nana*).

Highlights for the outing were eight Emus, Crested Shrike-tit, Musk Lorikeets, Black-fronted Dotterels, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Jacky Winters and two pair of Flame Robins.

RILENS RD/ GOLFLINKS TK

Australian Wood Duck, Galah, Emu (8), Noisy Miner, Willy Wagtail, Superb Blue Wren (6), Corella (33), Easter Rosella, Grey Shrike-thrush, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Welcome Swallow, Musk Lorikeets (4), Crested Shrike-tit, Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, White-plumed Honeyeater, White-faced Heron.

DAM

Magpie, Australian Raven, Australian Wood Duck (4), Welcome Swallows (30+) Corella, Indian Miner, Crimson Rosella, Masked Lapwing (2) Black-fronted Dotterel, Magpie Lark, Galah, Pardalote sp.

RED WHITE & BLUE TK/ BELLS TK

Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Magpie, White-throated Treecreeper, Australian Raven, Superb Blue Wren, Yellow Thornbill, Grey Currawong, Pardalote sp., Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Whistler?

MUCKLEFORD SCHOOL RD

Willy Wagtail, Australian Magpie, Galah (10), Red Wattlebird,
White-faced Heron, Silvereye (4), Jacky Winter (3), Flame Robin (2m 2f)
Masked Lapwing, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Chough (7), Corella (30+), Magpie (31)
Superb Blue Wren, Eastern Rosella, Galah, Black-fronted Dotterel.

September Observations - (September 1945 that is)

George Broadway

Continuing with our series looking at queries sent in to "Wildlife" magazine, and the answers provided by P. Crosbie Morrison, who could also be heard on radio station 3DB on Sunday at 6, and also on 3BO Bendigo at 7.15.

Among the insect queries was one about a "beetle" found in the seed pod of a Kurrajong tree which turned out to be a Kurrajong Weevil.

There were two specimens of Longicorn Beetle (again), the long antennae believed to be used for communication between individuals, but the mechanism not understood.

A caterpillar found on a eucalypt was a Cypress Looper Caterpillar which sometimes does great damage to Cypress Hedges. A large mouse-like moth brought in by a cat was a Ghost Moth, which feed on the underground roots of eucalypts and some other trees, and emerge usually on drizzly nights when only a few cats might be about, so are seldom seen. There was a chrysalis of the Cabbage White Butterfly and a baby Cup Moth Caterpillar.

Insects which disturbed plough horses at Portland were Adult Gum Saw Flies; however they are harmless to horses. Their larvae are the "Spitfires" which occur in masses on eucalypts.

A query concerned the Northern Finger Cherry which causes blindness. It is in no way related to the "Native Cherry" which fruit is harmless to eat. The Northern tree is found only in the Cairns, Cooktown area, and the blindness is caused by a fungus which attacks the fruit.

In response to "Heather" of Carlton, Australian Heaths, Epacridaceae were compared to Scottish Heather Calluna, a member of the Ericaceae.

For Alison of Kyabram, the various red robins were described, along with "Vertical Migration". The dark grey powder substance found on rain water pools was a mass of tiny primitive insects called "Springtails" (see my article in the Feb '86 Newsletter), and your bird was not a Woodpecker, there are none in Australia, it was in fact a Treecreeper.

Dorothy of Donald had seen what appeared to be a Noisy Miner. (One imagines there would be plenty at Donald)

B.J. Hutchison of Claremont (W.A.) asked about pigeon and dove nests, which are often so flimsy that the eggs fall out. The birds are never known to retrieve them.

Replies to J. Scash of Mordialloc, who asked about planting by the moon, i.e. planting root vegetables when the moon is waning and "upstairs" vegetables when the moon is waxing, he expressed the opinion that it was all superstition or "moonshine".

Kathleen from Brighton asked about the knobs on her cypress. These are the male flowers, the female flowers being the little cones, the pollen being transferred by

wind. Cypresses belonging to a group of plants more primitive than flowering plants.

Two "snakes" were submitted. One however was a legless lizard recognised by the presence of ear-holes, which snakes do not have. The other was a young brown snake with the characteristic head markings which disappear with age. (When I taught in the Mallee I often had students bring in young browns, asking if they were Copperheads because of the head markings)

A third snake was sent in by J Lyons of Woomelang. This turned out to be a "Slow-worm", English name, or *Typhlops*. It burrows in search of worms and insect larvae. It differs from other snakes in that the body is practically the same diameter all the way, and the belly scales are small like the ones on the back.

A query from "Interested" of Camperdown concerned a large completely black snake. These snakes which are only found on islands to the South of the Australian mainland are actually Tiger Snakes.

Mrs C.Willans of Willoohby NSW had to be told that there is no way to keep Huntsman Spiders out of the house and that it was not a good idea to spray them because they are useful and do no harm. Best to sweep them out. (I usually trap them in a jar to remove them outdoors)

Miss J McLaren of Regent had a Redback spider, *Latrodectus hasseltii*. Venomous but with short fangs and is not aggressive.

Graham McKay of Perth asked about a small animal resembling a caterpillar but with stumpy "legs" on every segment. It was an animal called *Peripatus*, apparently ancient, dating back to the time of the Trilobites. It has features resembling worms and insects and has been considered as linking the two groups. Because it lives in damp forests it was most unlikely to have ever been fossilised. It may be found in the Dandenongs where it lives in damp conditions, under bark of dead trees and under stones. Because of lack of a waterproof cuticle it is confined to permanently damp but not wet conditions.

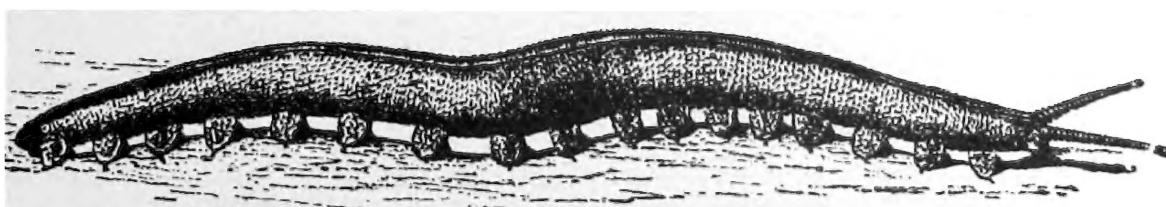


Fig. 214. *Peripatus capensis*, \times very slightly. From Sedgwick.

More Twitching from a Train – July 2016

By Chris Timewell

In a recent Castlemaine Naturalist article, I listed the 24 bird species seen during a morning train trip from Castlemaine to Melbourne on the 31 Dec 2015. During another trip to Melb. last week for the exciting purpose of meeting my newest nephew, Lenny, I undertook another train-based bird survey on both the way down (11 July) and back again (12 July). During the afternoon on the way down, the weather outside was cold and overcast, but with no rain and little wind - relatively good conditions for high speed bird observation. The weather on the return trip the

next morning was less kind to both bird and observer, with strong icy winds and patchy rain. However, it was pleasing to see so much standing water on both days – almost every dam was full or overflowing, and there was extensive water lying across the green paddocks throughout. Quite different from the December trip.

The result for July was 22 bird species on the way down and 14 on the way back, with 26 overall (plus three wild mammal species – not including humans, pet dogs and farm animals!). Australian Magpies and ravens were seen during every section on both trips. All species seen were either introduced species or relatively common natives, with the highlight being a Black-shouldered Kite hovering over grassland just north of Sunbury.

Key to Train Sections: 1 = Castlemaine-Kyneton (18 minutes), 2 = Kyneton-Woodend (9 mins), 3=Woodend-Gisborne (9-11 mins), 4=Gisborne-Sunbury (20 mins), 5=Sunbury-Southern Cross (28-35 mins)

Species Sections	To Melbourne, 11 July, arvo					To Castlemaine, 12 July, morn				
	1	2	3	4	5	5	4	3	2	1
MAMMALS										
Eastern Grey Kangaroo	√					√	√			√
*European Rabbit				√						
*Brown Hare								√		
BIRDS										
Australian Wood Duck		√				√		√		
Pacific Black Duck							√	√	√	√
Australian White Ibis				√						
Dusky Moorhen						√				
Black-shouldered Kite			√							
Falcon sp.			√							
Silver Gull					√	√				
Masked Lapwing				√						
Common Bronzewing	√									
Crested Pigeon	√									
*Spotted Dove					√	√				
*Rock Dove	√	√			√					√
Galah		√								
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	√						√			
Long-billed Corella	√									
Cockatoo/Corella sp.				√						
Crimson Rosella	√		√	√						√
Rainbow Lorikeet					√	√				
Red-rumped Parrot				√						
Magpie Lark						√				
Willie Wagtail					√					
Pied Currawong									√	
Australian Magpie	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Little Raven					√	√	√			
Raven sp.	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
*House Sparrow					√					
*Common Myna					√					
*Common Starling			√	√	√	√				
TOTAL BIRD SPECIES COUNT	8	5	5	8	11	9	3	3	4	6
				22					14	

Mystery Plant (August CN)

Geraldine Harris

Velleia paradoxa (Spur Velleia)

paradoxa = contrary to usual type

Velleia belong in the Goodenia family and look a lot like Goodenia with their five uneven petals but Velleia have their ovary above the petals and Goodenia have their ovaries below the petals (see photo 2 and 3).

Spur Velleia have a basal tuft of light green, narrow, bluntly toothed leaves; the flower stalks are branched with a pair of stalkless leaves or bracts at the base of each branch; and the five broadly “winged” yellow petals are united into a tube at the base of the flower where there is a conspicuous spur, thus the name Spur Velleia (see photo 3).

Spur Velleia flower in Spring and may be abundant on hills and ridges with shallow gravelly soils following good autumn and early winter rains. They die soon after the onset of hot weather.

Ref: Ern Perkins - *Plants of Castlemaine District*

1992, G M Cunningham , W E Mulham, P L Milthorpe, & J H Leigh, *Plants of Western NSW*



1 Velleia paradoxa (Spur Velleia) showing basal leaves and branched stems

2 Velleia paradoxa (Spur Velleia) showing ovary above petals

3 Velleia paradoxa (Spur Velleia) showing spur at base of flower

Mystery Bird – Nigel Harland

The answer to last month’s quiz was the **White-eared Honeyeater**, a reasonably common species usually found in pairs or on its own out of the breeding season. It is a slightly larger honeyeater than its counterparts. There are 76 species of honeyeater in Australia, with more in Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Apart from those with the name Honeyeater, others in the same Family include Wattlebirds, Chats, Miners, Friarbirds and Myzomelas. Some honeyeaters are migratory, occasionally over very large distances depending on climatic conditions. I recall seeing a Black Honeyeater locally many years ago, this is usually a bird of the arid interior of the Continent. Many honeyeaters are birds of the tropical north and there are three endemic to Tasmania – the Yellow Wattlebird, Strong-billed Honeyeater and Black-headed Honeyeater.

Bird and plant Quiz

See if you can recognise this month's bird photo (Nigel) and a tricky pair of orchids from Geraldine.



Roadside Cleanup 20/8/16

With a ten member team and less rubbish than usual along our designated strip of the Pyrenees Hwy, the cleanup was finished by 10.30 this time. It may be that drivers are less likely to open windows in cold wet weather to throw out rubbish but some of us would like to think people are behaving more responsibly and taking their rubbish home. We collected seven golf balls, threw a soccer ball back over the fence to the Steiner School and sighted a flock of Lorikeets, a healthy Slender Rice-flower (*Pimelea linifolia*), a scattering of Early Nancies (*Wurmbea dioica*) and a single Dwarf Green-hood (*Pterostylis nana*). Good team effort, George, Nigel, Sue, Jeremy, Jan, Sylvia, Cheryl and Ron, Geraldine and Geoff.

Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks

will commence on Wednesday September 14. We leave promptly at 4pm from the Octopus to inspect a good location at the time as determined by the leader, and return around 5pm. Non members are welcome.

A reminder to those members who have borrowed one of Ern's memory sticks - "Wild Plants of Castlemaine District - a plant identification guide" from our memory stick lending library to return their sticks at monthly meetings for updating and redistribution. The current version is 1D. Memory sticks with this version have a green sticker.

Please note that the deadline for articles for the October issue is September 30.

- ED

September speaker – Peter Muller

Our speaker this month will be Ballarat naturalist Peter Muller.

Peter was trained/educated/qualified in agriculture, but changed direction and pursued a career in natural land management. He worked for various environmental organisations, Parks Victoria and Conservation and land management, and the various forms that it has morphed into over the years. He gained substantial land management experience in a variety of disciplines and responsibilities, and over 30 years has worked in conservation in most areas in Victoria.

For the last 15 years, until recently retired, he has worked in environmental education with Ballarat/Federation University, a challenging but rewarding profession. “Now with a bit of time on my hands, I am devoting some of it to researching ants and, hopefully, to answering some questions about ants that I have had for many years. I hope, along the way, I can add a little bit to our environmental knowledge, and add value to natural areas particularly, roadside and remnants.”

Peter will lead the excursion on Saturday 10th, when we will try to find and identify nests of a variety of ants.

Observations

- ◆ Tania – Blue-faced Honeyeater, Botanical gdns in flowering gum; End July – White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Black-faced C-s, and W-b Sea-eagle seen at same time on Baringup rd.; **Grey Goshawk** reported seen on Malmsbury – Daylesford road.
- ◆ Happy Valley – Red capped and Flame Robins, Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo. Cuckoos (esp Fan-tailed) reported by several
- ◆ Two Swift Parrots seen flying in Green Gully two weeks ago
- ◆ George was surprised to see a lone Red-browed Finch on the lawn
- ◆ Botanical gardens 17/8; a lone Pelican in residence (cover photo), Golden Whistlers seen and Fan-tailed Cuckoo calling - Noel
- ◆ Geraldine noted finding Greenhoods (nana and smaragdyna) and Gnat Orchids along Pipeline track

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists

Coming events

Fri Sept. 9 meeting: PETER MULLER – Ant biology

Sat Sept. 10 field trip: leader Peter Muller

Wed Sept. 14 Wildflower walk 1. Leader Richard Piesse. 4pm. sharp

Wed Sept. 21 Wildflower walk 2. Leader Geraldine

Wed Sept. 28 Wildflower walk 3. Leader George

Wed Oct. 5 Wildflower walk 4. Leader to be decided

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

Subscriptions for 2016

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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